Worship and Resource Packet
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Call to Worship

Don’t leave your broken heart at the door:
   Bring it to the altar of life.
Don’t leave your anger behind
   It has high standards
   And the world needs vision.
Bring them with you,
   and your joy
   and your passion
Bring your loving
   and your courage
   and your conviction
Bring your need for healing
   and your powers to heal
There is work to do
   And all that we need to do it
   is here.
So let us come in
   and then reach beyond the walls of this church
Let us fill this sanctuary with love
   and then harness its power to stop oppression
Let us join together in worship
   and together let us stand on the side of love.

By Angela Herrera

We are called to gather in worship as a beloved community. We are called to set aside distractions and anxieties, that we might touch deeper springs and be renewed. We are called to seek and to share comfort for the hurts that afflict. We are called to desire more love, more justice, and life more abundant. We are called to truth, to mercy, to humility, and to courage. Let us answer the call with the yes of our lives.

By Kirk D. Loadman-Copeland (as published on the UUA Worship Web)

Take from life its coals, not its ashes.
Fan the flames of love and justice;
join hands and hearts in common endeavor;
and there will be no limit
to what we can achieve together.

By Laurel S. Sheridan (as published on the UUA Worship Web)
Responsive Reading

We gather in reverence for what is holy this day
Bringing many names for the sacred.

From our common journey,
We join as one community,
One body of people,
Standing on the side of love.

Among us: the weary, the sick, the heartbroken,
The joyful, the light of heart, the brave.
One people, in one circle of life,
Moved by the same spark.

In covenant together,
we answer a call of justice,
speaking out against oppression,
reaching out to a wider world that
teaches us,
humbles and heals us,
as we work to heal it.

We give thanks for this call, O Love, Our Source,
Though it is not always easy.

We arrive through these doors with many private burdens,
With secrets and regrets.
We are in need of forgiveness

By Angela Herrera
And in danger of despair.

A greater spirit, a greater story, moves in this place,
One in which our world may be reborn
Again and again anew
Because the sacred dwells among us,
And blesses our yearning for wholeness.

*Let us have the courage to go out into the world and change it,*
*To bring the world into ourselves, and be changed.*

Let us speak out with courage,
And act with compassion.

*May our journeys—of the spirit, and of mission—always be life-affirming and for justice,*
*However we may know you—*
*As God, as Truth, as Love—*
*Let them be in your name.*
Prayers

May I become at all times, both now and forever
A protector for those without protection
A guide for those who have lost their way
A ship for those with oceans to cross
A bridge for those with rivers to cross
A sanctuary for those in danger
A lamp for those without light
A place of refuge for those who lack shelter
And a servant to all in need

*Buddhist prayer of peace (published on Worldprayers.org)*

Universal Spirit of love, O God within each one of us, whose power reaches to the stars, whose love connects us one to another and to all creation -- we are one.

We cry out with the pain of this broken world. With all our capacity for love, we ask: why can't we wrap this world in love and bring healing? We confess that we are not always able to express the love we know is inside us. We feel constricted and hesitant, afraid that our love will be rejected or mis-used.

We pray for forgiveness, that we may learn to forgive others and accept their forgiveness of us. Help us let go of fear so we can move on, opening our hearts to one another. We pray for empowerment that we may learn to love more fully. Let our love shine forth from this sacred place that others may know that here they will find freedom, acceptance, community and love.

We give thanks for the blessings of love in our lives and for the chance we have to love again and always. May we feel the love inside us connecting with the love in each other and the stars. Amen. Blessed Be.

*Dorothy May Emerson (1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection; altered)*
O Spirit of Life, we pray, not to request your presence, but to call ourselves into it, for the sustaining peace, the wisdom, the silence are nearer than breath. You are the ground of being, the mover, the fire, and the place of rest. Within us lies your strength.

These are our prayers:
For the wounded let there be comfort.
May the weary be gathered in strength.
Let the downtrodden be lifted up,
And may we have the courage to make it so.

You move through our lives, O Spirit,
And through us your work is done.
With clarity
let us give voice to compassion,
Without wavering
May we stand on the side of love.

Amen.

By Angela Herrera
Readings

*From Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1967 address to the anti-war group Clergy and Laity Concerned:*

When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response. I am speaking of that force which all of the great religious have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality. This Hindu-Moslem-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up in the first epistle of Saint John: “Let us love one another; for love is God and everything that love[s] is born of God and know[s] God.”


*From Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”:*

But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label.

Was not Jesus an extremist for love: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”

Was not Amos an extremist for justice: “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”

Was not Paul an extremist: “I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.”

Was not Martin Luther an extremist? “Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God.”

And John Bunyan: “I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience.”

And Abraham Lincoln: “This nation cannot survive half slave and half free.”

And Thomas Jefferson: “We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal...”

So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be.

Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice, or for the extension of justice?

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (as published on Worldprayers.org)

If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love,  
I have become sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

And if I have prophecy and know all mysteries and  
all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains,  
but have not love, I am nothing.

And if I dole out all my goods, and  
if I deliver my body that I may boast  
but have not love, nothing I am profited.

Love is long suffering,  
love is kind,  
it is not jealous,  
love does not boast,  
it is not inflated.

It is not discourteous,  
it is not selfish,  
it is not irritable,  
it does not enumerate the evil.

It does not rejoice over the wrong,  
but rejoices in the truth

It covers all things, it has faith for all things,  
it hopes in all things, it endures in all things.

Love never falls in ruins;  
but whether prophecies, they will be abolished; or  
tongues, they will cease; or  
knowledge, it will be superseded.

For we know in part and we prophecy in part.

But when the perfect comes, the imperfect will be superseded.

When I was an infant,  
I spoke as an infant, I reckoned as an infant;  
when I became [an adult],  
I abolished the things of the infant.

For now we see through a mirror in an enigma, but  
then face to face.  
Now I know in part, but then I shall know  
as also I was fully known.

But now remains faith, hope, love, these three;  
but the greatest of these is love.
Inspirational Quotes

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“Love is all we have, the only way that each can help the other.”
- Eurpides

“We are all born for love. It is the principle of existence and its only end.”
- Benjamin Disraeli

“Love is to the moral nature exactly what the sun is to the earth.”
- Honore Balzac

“If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”
- Mother Teresa

“All, everything that I understand, I understand only because I love.”
- Leo Tolstoy

“Since love grows within you, so beauty grows. For love is the beauty of the soul.”
- Saint Augustine
“Standing on the Side of Love”

Where is our holy church? We are standing on the side of love.

Many Unitarian Universalists suffer from a chronic identity crisis. People ask us, what do Unitarian Universalists believe? And—we freeze! We don’t know what to say, because Unitarian Unitarians believe so many things, so many different things. We are priests of paradox, apostles of ambiguity, nattering nabobs of nuance.

And so the Unitarian Universalist Association produces seven principles and six sources and countless pamphlets and little wallet cards all to remind us what we kinda sorta believe. We are exhorted to compose elevator speeches, summations of Unitarian Universalism so pithy they might be recited on an elevator in its fleeting passage between floors.

Do we believe in God? Question—simple. Answer—impossible.

Define “God.”

Define “believe.”

Define “we.”

Define “in.”

Whatever God is or is not, I don’t think God cares what we believe. I don’t think Jesus cares what we believe. And I know the Buddha doesn’t care what we believe.

The important question is not what we believe, it’s where we stand.

I want to be standing on the side of love.

Of course when I say “standing” I’m not talking about a physical posture. Rosa Parks stood on the side of love by remaining seated.

I’m talking about a moral stance not just assumed privately in our hearts but witnessed boldly in our families and schools and workplaces and communities, at the State House, in the halls of Congress. I’m talking about faith in action.

I’m not talking about sanctimony. I’m talking about intentionality. Understanding that our practice will be imperfect as each of us is imperfect, what is our purpose? What is our aspiration? What is our commitment?
Standing on the side of love.

When Unitarian Lydia Maria Child defied the prohibition of her time against women speaking in public and demanded freedom for enslaved African-Americans and the vote for women, when she protested the Trail of Tears, the brutal removal of the Cherokee, she was standing on the side of love.

When Unitarian Universalist minister Jim Reeb heeded the call of Martin Luther King Jr. to Selma, AL, and was bludgeoned to death by racists, he was standing on the side of love.

When at the height of the debate over same-sex marriage in Massachusetts this congregation voted to hang a banner over the church door proclaiming to every passerby “Support Marriage Equality. We do.” we were standing on the side of love.

By the way, did you hear that Massachusetts now has the lowest divorce rate in the country?

In 2004, when same-sex marriage became legal here, the divorce rate was 2.2 per thousand. Since then it’s gone down to 2.0 per thousand—the lowest levels since before World War Two.

Rachel Maddow says “It turns out gay marriage is a Defense of Marriage Act.” Who knew?

Standing on the side of love doesn’t require power. It requires courage. Because courage is power.

When a child on a playground sticks up for another who is teased or bullied or left out because they’re different, that child is standing on the side of love.

My daughter Lucy just turned six years old. Adopted from China, Lucy loves swimming and crafts and Hannah Montana. “Everybody’s weird,” Lucy tells me. “If you’re not weird, you’re just air.” Just air.

Let’s be more than air.

The Unitarian Universalist Association has launched a Standing on the Side of Love campaign to confront exclusion and violence based on identity, be it sexual orientation, gender presentation, immigration status, race, class, religions, nationality, physical ability, or any other excuse for harassment.

Standing on the side of love affirms the full humanity of all people. It honors the inherent worth and dignity, the spark of the divine in each and every person.

Standing on the side of love means treating each other well, whether ally or adversary. “Love is patient;” wrote the Apostle Paul, “love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.”

Standing on the side of love means being more committed to being reconciled than to being right. Love “does not insist on its own way.... It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

A religious person, Rabbi Abraham Heschel taught us, is one “whose greatest passion is compassion, whose greatest strength is love and defiance of despair.”

His friend Martin Luther King Jr. added, “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”
So when someone asks us what Unitarian Universalists believe, or why we’re speaking out on gay rights or immigrant rights or disability rights or human rights, or why we bother to drag our sorry selves down to First Parish in Cambridge on a Sunday morning, let’s tell ’em: We are standing on the side of love.

We are standing on the side of love.

Amen and Blessed Be.
Questions for Theological Reflection

How do you see justice unfolding and how can we be part of it?

How do we, as people of faith, respond to inequality and oppression?

How do we ensure that the divisions among us—racism, classism, ableism, sexism, heterosexism, and religious plurality—don’t prevent us from reaching for something better?

How do we act from both a sense of righteousness and humility?

What does it mean that listening is an act of love?

In what ways are you part of truly inclusive communities? In what ways do you fall short?

Where is there opportunity to create more inclusive community?

Do you ever think of yourself as a member of a class, i.e. “upper class,” “rich,” middle class,” “working class,” “struggling,” “poor.” etc.? If so, what categories describe your feelings? Why or why not? Do you hold shame in talking about these ideas out loud with others?

Can you think of times when you have contributed to being an “oppressor?” What about times when you were the “oppressed?”

Cornel West said, “Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.” What does that mean to you? What does our love look like in public? How must we open ourselves up to make this possible?

Imagine what the world would look like the day after tomorrow if “the revolution—the great transformation” came—where economic disparity between the uber—rich and the majority who are struggling was bridged. Where scapegoating of LGBTQ people, immigrants, Muslims, and others was eradicated. What does this world look like to you?

Unitarian Universalism is a relational, covenantal religion. Who is embraced in our covenant? How?